Industry insight - Publishing

In a nutshell

Publishing includes a range of industries concerned with the production and distribution of information including newspapers, magazines, books, journals and directories.

Publishing is a rapidly changing sector. Developments in online publishing and digital technologies are changing the landscape of the industry. While there has been a slight decline in employment generally within the last three years, some areas have seen a much greater decline. Employment in newspaper publishing, for example, has fallen by about one quarter (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2010).

However, new technology has led to potential opportunities for people with skills and interest in areas like digital publishing and multimedia production. For graduates, training, industry knowledge and work experience are key to finding employment in the publishing industry.

What kind of work can I do?

Within publishing houses separate departments are usually responsible for different stages in the publication process. Work can include:

- **Administration** - customer services, IT support, financial, personnel and accountancy roles.
- **Contracts and rights (legal)** - negotiating and drawing up contracts; selling rights to publications to film or TV companies, merchandising companies, or other publishers; and legal work including advising on intellectual property rights and dealing with disputes.
- **Production and design** - designers are responsible for planning the overall look and feel of a publication; production involves management of the practical aspects of typesetting, printing and binding.
- **Distribution and sales** - warehousing, logistics, sales and account management.
- **Editorial** - commissioning work or buying manuscripts, and then liaising with authors, design and production to see the work through to publication.
- **Marketing and publicity** - planning advertising campaigns and events, and developing advertising and marketing material.

In addition, newspaper and magazine publishing will tend to have roles in:

- **Advertising** - a crucial source of revenue.
- **Circulation and subscriptions**
- **Journalism** - many magazines and newspapers will employ writers and journalists directly, although some will be freelance.

What’s it like working in this industry?

- Working conditions are normally good with larger companies offering a range of benefits.
- Working culture is generally sociable and relaxed though the environment can become pressurised around publishing deadlines.
- The sector is well represented in terms of women and disabled employees. However, there is lower than average representation from ethnic minorities.
Hours can be long although there are opportunities for flexible working in most parts of the sector, with freelance staff used by almost half of all publishing companies.

Entry to the industry is competitive and a high level of commitment is expected for what can be a relatively low salary.

Salaries vary between different sectors of the industry. Trade publishing and educational publishing tend to attract lower salaries, with scientific, technical and medical publishing attracting higher salaries. In these roles you will often be expected to combine editorial skills with subject knowledge.

The industry is undergoing rapid changes and can provide a dynamic, exciting and challenging work environment for those determined to succeed.

There are approximately 194,650 people working in the UK publishing industry (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2011).

It is estimated that there are over 11,000 publishing businesses in the UK (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2011).

The industry generates over £10billion GVA (Gross Value Added) (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2011).

The UK publishing industry is a world leader in the export sales of books, journal subscriptions and intellectual property rights.

Most publishing companies are small and have less than ten employees. However, there are a low number of very large companies who employ a high proportion of the publishing workforce (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2011).

Employment in the sector is concentrated in the subsectors of book, newspaper, journal and periodical and other publishing. Smaller numbers of people are employed in directories, news agencies and other information services.

Over a third of publishing jobs are based in London, and half are based in London or the South East of England. Outside London there are clusters of publishing jobs in Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol and Bath, Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh, and smaller concentrations of jobs in the South West and East of England. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland account for 10% of jobs overall. There are many small publishers in these areas.

Further information
Creative and Cultural Skills
The Irish Book Publishers’ Association (CLE)
Music Publishers Association Ltd

Entry and progression

How do I find a job?

Book publishing vacancies are advertised in The Bookseller and BookCareers.
Newspaper, magazine and journal vacancies can be found in MediaGuardian, Press Gazette, PPA Jobs, Hold the Front Page, Journalism.co.uk.
Jobs may be advertised throughout the year.
Entry to this sector is competitive. It is important to research the companies you are interested in and their products.
Get to know the market place - find out who the major publishers are, check company trading figures in publications like The Bookseller, attend book fairs and industry events, and build a network of contacts.
Join The Society of Young Publishers (SYP) or Women in Publishing as a student member. Pay attention to the bestseller lists and to how books, magazines and newspapers are publicised and look for trends in the industry.
Alongside qualifications you will need to demonstrate a genuine interest in the industry, the products and the readers.
It is advisable to seek some publishing work experience to give yourself an edge.
Larger employers may offer graduate training schemes, but places are limited and competition is very high.
Speculative applications may be successful for entry level jobs.
Smaller publishers are a good route into employment, especially if you have an interest in a specialism and can identify a publisher in this area.
It is vitally important to ensure your CV or application is flawless – spelling, grammar and presentation need to be extremely good. Make sure your covering letter highlights your relevant experience and interest in the particular job.
You can sometimes find a way into publishing by working in a different industry but in a role which has transferrable skills, such as sales or marketing.

Find out more about job application advice.

**What skills do I need?**

Employers look for a number of skills and attributes. These can be developed through work experience and will often include:

- accuracy and attention to detail;
- self-motivation and initiative;
- time management and organisation skills;
- the ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines;
- strong literacy and communication skills;
- diplomacy and the ability to deal with all kinds of people;
- creativity;
- a good sense of visual design;
- adaptability;
- commercial acumen;
- numerical dexterity;
- competence in IT;
- tenacity and a passion for what you do.

Additionally, graduates looking for work within design or production need experience of desktop publishing software packages such as Quark, Photoshop and In-Design.
Work experience placements in publishing houses are ideal places to develop these skills. Work experience in other sectors can develop transferrable skills. Voluntary work and training courses may also be worth considering.

Most companies will look for a good first degree. Literacy skills may also be demonstrated through your academic studies. Some degree courses have modules in publishing or related subjects which may help build your knowledge and interest in the publishing industry. A strong academic background is particularly important in book publishing.

**Where can I find work experience?**

Publishing can be a very competitive industry to get into, and work experience is often the key to standing out from the crowd. Working on your university paper, magazine or students’ union website can be valuable experience.

Some of the major companies have placement and internship schemes that are promoted and advertised through the trade press and organisations like your university careers service, BookCareers or the SYP. However, the majority of work placements are not advertised so you may need to contact companies directly. Research an organisation to find out the name of the head of department in which you would like to work. Contact them attaching your CV and a covering email or letter, enquiring whether work experience is on offer and outlining the reasons why you would like it.

Attending industry events and using any personal contacts you have to get an introduction to people working in the sector can also be a useful way of finding out about opportunities.

**Is postgraduate study useful?**

In the book and journal publishing industries people often gain a specialist qualification at postgraduate level before entering the profession. Postgraduate study may help you develop relevant skills and knowledge and provide access to professional networks, but it is not essential. A number of universities run postgraduate programmes in publishing and details are available at the SYP.

In newspaper and magazine journalism gaining an accredited technical or vocational qualification is much more important, and often essential, to entering the industry.

Training courses are also available in areas relevant to publishing such as editing, rights and contracts, copywriting, desktop publishing, proofreading and graphic design. Employers may support further training in specialist areas once you are working for them. However, competition for entry to the profession is such that you may be expected to have basic competence in most areas before you start.

Training providers include:

- Professional Publishers Association (PPA) - in association with the Periodicals Training Council (PTC)
- Publishing Training Centre
- National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)
- The Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP)

**How can my career develop?**

There are many opportunities for career development. In larger companies there may be opportunities for structured career progression through a hierarchy of roles. Smaller publishers may offer less structured
progression options, but can give employees much wider experience in the industry facilitating progression to a broader range of jobs.

Responsibility and creative input increase with seniority and experience. Editorial posts are often seen as the top jobs in book publishing, although there may be opportunities at the highest levels for editorial directors and publishers. Progression to senior roles requires commercial acumen and leadership skills. These are skills that may be built up through employment or additional qualifications.

Often there is no typical career path and it is important for employees to be alert to opportunities in the sector. Networking and maintaining professional contacts may be an important way to identify opportunities, particularly if you are interested in freelance work.

Further information
Associated Newspapers Limited
Campaign
The Daily Telegraph Jobs
The Independent
The Times Jobs

**Typical employers**

**Big players**

The publishing industry in the UK is dominated by European and global business conglomerates, many of whom own a portfolio of media businesses.

An example is the Pearson group - the largest publisher in the world - with divisions covering many sectors across the industry including Penguin, Pearson Education and the Financial Times Group.

The four main consumer publishers in the book industry are:

- HarperCollins
- Random House
- Hachette
- Penguin
- Other companies include:
  - Bloomsbury
  - Macmillan
  - Faber & Faber
  - Walker Books
  - Kogan Page

Educational, academic, specialist and technical publishers include:

- Wolters Kluwer
- Elsevier
- Macmillan
- Oxford University Press (OUP)
- Cambridge University Press (CUP)
A publishing house is usually made up of several divisions, each concentrating on a different area of publishing, e.g. fiction/non-fiction, textbook/monograph, journal/directory. Each division manages its own subdivisions, such as adult fiction or children’s fiction. These divisions or subdivisions may publish books under a separate brand name known as an imprint. Examples of the more popular imprints within the Penguin Group include Dorling Kindersley, Ladybird, Puffin and Putnam.

Large consumer magazine publishers include:
- Future Publishing
- Dennis Publishing
- IPC Media
- National Magazines
- Bauer
- Condé Nast
- BBC Worldwide
- Business media, data and directory publishers include:
  - Haymarket
  - Incisive Media
  - Informa/Taylor & Francis,
  - RBI
  - Yell
  - Dun + Bradstreet
  - KCOM

There are a number of agency publishers, these include:
- Redwood Publishing
- Seven Squared

Newspaper publishers in the UK include:
- Trinity Mirror
- News International
- Newsquest
- Johnston Press
- Archant
- Telegraph
- Guardian News & Media
- DMGT

Larger companies are more likely to operate formal graduate recruitment schemes, although the number of places offered is often small, normally between two and ten. The role usually consists of working on rotation in the different areas of the business before choosing an area in which to specialise on a more permanent basis.
Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are organisations with less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of no more than £44million. Working for a smaller company can be rewarding because you are more likely to forge a path for yourself within the company, although opportunities to try other departments may be limited.

SMEs are unlikely to use the testing and assessment techniques of larger companies, or follow lengthy recruitment procedures. SMEs are more likely to advertise their vacancies through the local press, university careers service bulletins, local graduate vacancy listings, jobcentres, and word of mouth, rather than rely on their reputation and a presence at graduate recruitment fairs.

Your university careers service should have listings of jobs with small firms. See also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

The publishing industry has a significant number of influential small and independent publishing houses, with almost 90% of companies having ten employees or fewer (Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media, 2011).

Self-employment

Freelance work is common in the publishing industry, and employers are predicting the level of freelancing to increase.

Publishing companies typically employ freelancers for writing, graphic design, proofreading, editing and research. Freelance work is more common in book and journal publishing than in newspaper publishing.

Find out more about self-employment.

Further information

London Book Fair
Hay Festival
Edinburgh International Book Festival
Frankfurt Book Fair

Opportunities abroad

Will my qualifications be recognised?

The publishing industry is global and opportunities for graduates exist in many countries outside the UK. Many of the large publishing houses are owned by multinational companies with head offices outside of the UK. They may also have functions around the globe, so chances of getting a job overseas are good.

UK qualifications are often recognised globally and a UK degree is usually valuable when working abroad. UK work experience is also recognised as useful.

Although most of the work is coordinated from the UK opportunities may exist in other English-speaking countries in particular.
International students, and those with knowledge of relevant languages other than English, may have an advantage in applying for jobs outside of the UK. Many UK-based jobs in publishing may require a great deal of national and international travel including attending trade fairs and conferences. For further information see country profiles, working abroad and graduate job search.

---

**Future trends**

**Retailing**
There have been major changes in the retailing of books in recent years. Large supermarket chains are now selling books in-store at highly discounted rates and, alongside the high-street chain, Waterstone’s, account for a large proportion of book sales. Success for publishers can depend on a handful of bestselling titles being sold in large quantities.

The growth of online book shopping is also impacting on the industry. Book publishers are increasingly recognising the value of online selling and are looking to develop ways of nurturing this retail channel and retaining control over it.

**Globalisation**
Publishers are increasingly large, multinational organisations working across a number of countries. Rights to books may be sold internationally, and export sales account for a large proportion of publishers’ revenue. Aspects of the business such as typesetting, and even editing, may be outsourced to other countries. The use of digital technologies and online publication allows publishers to reach a global market easily.

**Digital technologies**
The rise of digital technologies is allowing consumers to access publishers’ products in different formats from a range of platforms. How to maximise the potential of new technologies is a key concern for publishers. Business models are moving from business-to-business to business-to-consumer models and books and newspapers are increasingly seen as brands that consumers buy into. The development of websites, blogs, a social media presence and associated merchandising are all important in brand creation. Accordingly, publishers need individuals who are comfortable working across these different platforms and have the ability to think strategically and creatively.

**E-books and online publishing**
New technologies and consumer demand is resulting in more books, journals and magazines being published in digital formats. The number of books sold is decreasing year on year, and digital sales are rapidly expanding, with total consumer digital sales leaping by over 300% from 2009 to 2010 (Publishers Association (PA), 2011).

Digital environments offer very different consumer environments. Typically, consumers access large amounts of content for free, but revenue may be generated from paid-for services, advertising and subscriptions. As digital technologies are impacting on the publishing industry new ways of selling and marketing to customers, and of managing customer relationships, are developing.

Newspapers and magazines now commonly publish some content online free of charge and book publishers may make chapters of books free to access online. Because online texts can be accessed, searched and archived...
more easily, the journal publishing industry has also seen significant change, and there are on-going debates about the advantages and disadvantages of different business models, including open access models. Accessing material online is also challenging copyright and intellectual property rights issues. As with the music industry, downloading books and articles may lead to issues of ‘sharing’ material and piracy. Publishers increasingly need employees with an understanding of the legal implications of the digital environment.

**Further information**

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)
Association of Online Publishers (AOP)
The Booksellers Association (BA)

**Jargon buster**

- AI – ‘advance information’ sheet on a product. This typically lists key details such as price, title, authors and main selling points.
- B2B - business-to-business (information or commerce between businesses).
- B2C - business-to-consumer (information or commerce from business to consumer).
- Backlist - titles that are being published for the second time or more.
- Buying calendar - the points in the year where retailers decide what to buy from publishers.
- Copy-editing - the process of reading through text and improving style, content and accuracy.
- Cross-selling - using one product to promote another from a different sales channel.
- Digitisation - taking the format of hard copy (on paper) and turning it into digital content which can be used online and via mobile phones.
- Disk date - when the digital files are submitted to the printers.
- DRM - digital rights management.
- DTP - desktop publishing.
- E-books - books that can be downloaded to an e-book reader or personal computer.
- Emerging markets - markets that have yet to be exploited. Currently, Eastern Europe and China are seen as emerging markets within publishing.
- Extent - total pages in a book.
- Flat plan - a document that shows how the pages will fall into place.
- Frontlist - titles that are being created from scratch.
- Front matter - sections at the start before roman numbering starts.
- Imprint page - the page at the front of a book listing the ISBN, date of publication, publisher and copyright holder.
- Jacket - or dust jacket/cover - the outer wrapping of a book, usually a hardback.
- List - titles being worked on.
- Loss leader - a bestselling title that the publisher discounts to the bookseller, enabling the publisher to negotiate the sale of other books, including newer authors, which the bookseller might not otherwise be prepared to buy.
- Masthead - details of publisher and editorial staff, generally printed on the title page of a publication.
• Media sales - the selling of advertising space within a magazine, newspaper, journal or website.
• Open access (OA) - open access text is freely accessible online with no charge attached.
• Pagination - page numbers.
• PDF - portable document format.
• Print on demand (POD) - the system where copies of the book are only printed as and when they are ordered.
• Print run - the number of copies of the product to be printed.
• Proofread - reading to detect and mark errors in a document to be corrected prior to printing.
• RAP date - ready at printers.
• Repro - reprographics - getting images and content ready for print.
• Sale or return - when the retailer makes a deal with the publisher to return unsold books.
• Slicing and dicing - the manipulation of content in electronic form which allows the user to select and pay only for the information they need.
• Slush pile - the collection of unsolicited manuscripts sent to a publisher.
• STM - scientific, technical, medical.
• Trade - products sold to the general public via high street stores or general websites.
• Type-script - a typewritten document, as opposed to hand-written or printed.
• Typesetting - the point at which the text and images are laid out on the page as they will appear in the final product.

Case study

Joanne studied English and German literature at Warwick University and now works as an assistant editor for humanities at a large academic publishing house.

Although I was studying subjects I loved at university, I worried that I would graduate and have nothing to do. Doing some online research I thought I might enjoy publishing. Not knowing much about it as an industry, I wrote to a publishing house enquiring about work experience. I worked there during most of my holidays and found I loved the work. So when my ex-boss contacted me after graduation with the news of a job vacancy, I jumped at the chance to apply.

I started as an editorial assistant and after a couple of years progressed to assistant editor. As an editor you are at the centre of the organisation, and my work involves liaising with all the different departments involved in producing a book. In a typical day I may look at draft type-scripts and provide feedback for authors, liaise with designers on the cover design for books, write briefing notes instructing the production department what I’m looking for regarding a particular book, and write some content for the marketing department about books due for publication.

The best part of my job is working with authors. I hold regular author meetings and I love taking an idea for a book from the preliminary proposal stage, to developing the idea with the author and then seeing it come off. As I have progressed in my career I have had more opportunity to do this kind of commissioning work, and I may progress even further with it if I become a commissioning editor. I am really lucky because I work on a list directly related to my degree and I love being able...
to draw on my subject knowledge in developing ideas, in proofreading texts and in author meetings.

The hardest part of my job can be time management. I have multiple projects on the go at any one time, all at different stages of the publication process, and I have to liaise with lots of different people. Publishing is a continually busy and demanding environment, but it is also very rewarding. I love working in a job where I get to use my subject knowledge every day, and working with academics, writers and colleagues who are all passionate about the work we do.

My advice to anyone seeking to enter the profession is to research the companies and the roles in publishing really thoroughly. All companies have different areas of interest and it’s important to know this. I would also suggest you get work experience, preferably in both smaller and larger publishers to get a breadth of understanding of the industry.

Written by Rosie Alexander, University of the Highlands and Islands 2012

© Content copyright of or licensed to AGCAS (www.agcas.org.uk)
To view the terms and conditions for the material provided in this publication, please see: www.agcas.org.uk/disclaimer